Illiteracy 1912
Census

AMERICAN ILLITERACY.

The attitude some of our people assume in deprecating foreigners and all that is foreign, argues them both narrow and intolerant. In respects to some of the purposes and activities of life we may, with propriety, study European countries. For instance, in the matter of education, both Germany and England ar far ahead of us. It would be folly for us to deny it.

Figures compiled by the United States Bureau of Education show that there are only three persons out of every 10,000 in Germany who cannot read and write; that there are 150 illiterates out of every 10,000 persons in Great Britain. In the United States the proportion is 770 illiterates in 10,000.

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The Department of Education is not convincing when it explains the great discrepancy by saying that the figures taken in Germany relate only to adults, while the figure taken in the United States embrace all persons over the age of ten years. Inasmuch as nearly every person learns to read and write before he is ten years of age, if he learns to read at all, the explanation is not satisfying.

The principal reason for the large proportion of illiterates in America is the presence of several million negroes, a considerable number of Indians and thousands of foreign immigrants, who come from the most illiterate classes of certain European nations. All American States having a large negro population, have a large class of illiterates. For instance, in Alabama, which is low in the list of States, when literacy is considered, there is only 9 per cent of the white population illiterate. On the other hand nearly 40 per cent of the total negro population is illiterate.

It is to be remembered, however, that no real or general effort has been made to give the negro the education except in the past forty years. It is also to be remembered that the percentage of illiterates among the negroes is steadily decreasing. The negro is yet in the position where he must depend upon the white race for the education of his children. The steady decrease in the number of negro illiterates is evidence of a growing spirit of generosity on the part of the dominant race, as well as of an eagerness on the part of negro children to go to school.

DECREASE IN ILLITERACY.

Illiteracy showed an amazing decrease in Alabama between 1900 and 1910. In 1900 the number of illiterates in Alabama composed thirty-four per cent. of the population over ten years of age. These were humiliating figures. They placed Alabama near the foot in the roll call of States. This depressing fact had already stirred Alabamians to action.

The movement to remove this blight from the State had been inaugurated in 1900, but at that time its results were but beginning. In 1910 the percentage of illiterates had shown the gratifying decrease to twenty-two per cent. of the total population. This percentage is entirely too high; but we can get comfort from the fact that it is rapidly decreasing. The enormous work done in the interest of common schools of Alabama during the past twelve years is bearing fruits. In the present decade there will be another amazing decrease in the percentage of illiterates.

These figures relating to illiteracy in Alabama are taken from an official bulletin, recently issued by the Census Department. From the same source, we find as was to have been expected that the great percentage of illiteracy was among the negroes of the State. The percentage of illiteracy is 40.1 among the negroes and, 9.9 among the natives and 11.3 among foreign born whites. An illiteracy percentage of 9.9 among the native born white population is not discouraging; that percentage can be improved and it is being improved, even as the exceptionally heavy percentage of illiteracy among negroes is being improved.

In the towns and cities there are fewer illiterates than in the country, a condition due to the better school facilities of the towns. The census bulletin shows that the percentage of illiterates in the country is 25.2 and in the rural districts and thirteen percent. in the cities and towns.

But we are going forward; the past ten years was but a promise for the next ten years.

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